

JOHN BRENNAN, UNPLUGGED

As a special service to emptywheel readers, I am going to provide an abridged version of John Brennan's answers to Additional Prehearing Questions in advance of his confirmation hearing on Thursday.

Q1 Bullet 3: 7 CIA officers died in Khost in a suicide bombing that was direct retaliation for our drone attack on a funeral, and then another drone attack on a thuggish enemy of Pakistan and his young wife. Let's discuss this event as a counterintelligence event, shall we?

A: I have been impressed with CIA's counterintelligence briefings.

Q6 Bullet 1: What principles should determine whether we conduct covert action under Title 50, where they're legally supposed to be, or Title 10, where we've been hiding them?

A: Whatever works. But tell Congress!

Q6 Bullet 3: Should we reevaluate this?

A: Only if the President decides he wants to stop this shell game.

Q7: Should CIA be a paramilitary agency?

A: See answer to question 6.1.

Q9: We missed the Arab Spring. Shouldn't we expect better?

A: The liaison relationships with Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia that failed us before won't fail us again.

Q10: Rather than asking whether you set up the CIA-on-the-Hudson, can you just answer whether you knew about this attempt to bypass restrictions on CIA operating in the US?

A: Yes, I did. CIA likes providing "key support" to local entities under the guise of Joint Terrorism Task Forces.

Q12: How would you manage CIA?

A: Moral rectitude.

Q13: You have lied about things like the Osama bin Laden raid to boost President Obama's political fortunes. How will you ensure independence from the White House?

A: I will provide him with objective intelligence but I won't necessarily provide such objective intelligence to anyone else.

Q15: How will you work with your buddies in the Saudi and similar intelligence agencies?

A: I will be the gatekeeper to all US intelligence community elements, but I promise to keep the Chief of Mission informed. At least about what the US side of that relationship is doing.

Q16: How will you staff the agency?

A: Moral rectitude.

Q17: How will you ensure accountability?

A: As CIA did when it was torturing, we'll refer allegations of criminal wrongdoing to DOJ.

Q20: What is the proper relationship between Director of CIA and Director of National Intelligence?

A: James Clapper and I are buds, so it doesn't really matter what the proper relationship is supposed to be.

Q22 Bullet 1: How's our information sharing going?

A: Great! We're sharing with DOD, DHS, state, local, tribal, private sector, and international partners! But don't worry about Americans' privacy because I think we shared this much information with these many counter-parties responsibly.

Q22 Bullet 4: What information won't you share with the Intelligence Communities?

A: Instead of answering that let me cite statute and say I'll inform you of "significant" developments.

Q23: We haven't been getting information from the secretive Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning. Are you responsible for that?

A: You're only allowed to get that information after we've made up our mind.

Q24: Did you write Susan Rice's talking points?

A: No.

Q25: Will you give us information? Will you let the President refuse to give us information?

A: Let me cite statute again. Flexibility! Gang of Four! 12 year old Memoranda of Notification as transparency!

You see, the Executive Branch decides how much oversight the Executive Branch needs.

Q26: Will you give us OLC memos?

A: Probably not.

Q27: Does the CIA have to admit when it has lied to Congressional intelligence committees?

A: Yes. But only to the committees.

Q28: What will you do to cut down on leaks?

A: In January 2012, CIA Inspector General audited "CIA's Process for Investigating Leaks of Classified Information." I commit to read that report and its recommendations and might even consider some of the recommendations.

Q29: Can people with security clearance – including contractors – share classified information with the media and Hollywood?

A: When high level executive branch officials leak, it is considered, "acknowledg[ing] classified information to a member of the media or [] declassify[ing] information for the very purpose of limiting damage to national security

by protecting sources and methods or stemming the flow of additional classified information.” But only senior Agency officials have the power to save the classified info by leaking it.

Q30: The Public Interest Declassification Board says the classification system is outdated. Do you agree?

A: Let me answer after I’m confirmed.

Q31: Is the CIA transparent enough?

A: Sensitive intelligence sources and methods should not be sacrificed in an effort to increase transparency.

Q32: Tell us how much you have leaked.

A: Yes.

Q34 Bullet 1: You claim you opposed torture. Prove it.

A: That’s a sensitive intelligence source and method.

Q34 Bullet 2: What role should the CIA play in detention, interrogation, and rendition?

A: The CIA’s subject matter expertise should be leveraged in interrogation.

Q35: Have you read the torture report?

A: If confirmed I promise to read it.

Q36: Where should terrorists be indefinitely detained?

A: I don’t get to decide but if needed we would find some place.

Q37 Bullet 1: Define imminent as used before you decide to kill someone.

A: I know it when I see it.

Q37 Bullet 3: Is the US at war with terrorist organizations besides al Qaeda?

A: No, but we’re using intelligence and military resources against them anyway.

Q38: Do you support legislation to use drone strikes outside of "hot" battlefields?

A: Jeh Johnson has already said the world is the battlefield.

Q39: Is there a drone rulebook?

A: Not so much a rulebook as little scraps of paper strewn around I sometimes lose.

Q40: Did you lie about civilian casualties?

A: Harness Tragedy Myriad Regrettably Dialogue ...
Sorry, what was the question again?